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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 15 July 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. GALUŠKA (Czech Republic)

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REGIONAL COOPERATION

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

REGIONAL COOPERATION (E/1997/5, 40 and Add.1, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 and 51)

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)), speaking as moderator, invited the panellists briefly to outline the economic and social situation in their respective regions, the programme of work of their commissions and the reform measures they had taken following the resolution adopted by the Council at its previous session.

Mr. BERTHELOT (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)) focused in his statement on two questions which had been raised at the World Economic Forum, which had met in Salzburg during the previous week and had been attended by a dozen heads of State and Government from European countries, and the answers given thereto. The first question had been one of ascertaining whether the countries in transition were adopting the Anglo-Saxon or the Rhenish model. The Prime Minister of Estonia had replied that his country was endeavouring to introduce a system in line with its needs. The speaker considered that that reply summed up two lessons which the ECE had drawn from the experience of the past six years: firstly, there was no one simple recipe by which the smooth running of a market economy could be guaranteed; and secondly, that the market by itself did not provide the impetus necessary for required restructuring and investments or guarantee a pattern of income distribution which would ensure social cohesion. Those conclusions were confirmed by trends in European economies.

Growth was expected to continue in the countries of Central Europe, and the trend reversal the first signs of which had appeared during the previous year in a number of CIS countries was expected to become consolidated. The fact that growth was being led by domestic demand and investment was an encouraging sign and indicative of confidence on the part of investors. There were, however, two disquieting clouds on the horizon. Firstly, the deteriorating current-account situation in most of the countries concerned was liable to cause concern in financial markets. Macroeconomic measures had been taken; but exports were still being hampered by delays in restructuring and institutional inertia. Reforms of the banking system and financial institutions needed to be undertaken as a matter of priority if financial capital was to be attracted. Secondly, in the East as in the West, the numbers of jobs available (and frequently their quality as well) were

inadequate, and social protection schemes were either too expensive or ill-adapted to circumstances. That was a problem to which the entire region would have to face up.

The second question was whether the decisions of the Madrid Summit would increase security in Europe. The participants in the Salzburg Forum endeavoured to situate those decisions both in time - as marking the beginning of a process - and in space in the context of the treaties, mechanisms and institutions helping to prevent the fault-lines between the different elements in the region from deepening.

As a meeting place for all the countries in the region, ECE had a particularly important role to play in the field of integration, and the reform process it had undertaken would enable it better to play its part in that field. The principal features of that process were a refocusing of activities in fields in which ECE had particular strengths, a greater concern with the countries in transition and the Mediterranean countries, support for subregional arrangements and initiatives and decentralization of decision-making. The reform of ECE was being undertaken in the context of the restructuring plan drawn up by the Secretary-General. In the implementation of that plan the Economic and Social Council should ensure satisfactory coordination between the regional commissions and all the intergovernmental organizations - whether within the UN family or not - which were active in the different regions so as to ensure that those bodies would make full use of the expertise of the regional commissions.

Mr. AMOAKO (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)) expressed satisfaction at the economic progress achieved in the African region. In 1996 the growth rate had reached approximately 5 per cent, as against 3.4 per cent in 1995 and 0.9 per cent in 1994; 31 countries had achieved growth in GDP per head; a number of countries had reduced their fiscal and current-account deficits; and progress had been made with monetary stabilization and the control of inflation. The resumption of growth was improving the chances of improving the quality of development in Africa. However, progress was unstable, and some subregions were lagging behind. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 10 per cent of the world's population, but produced only 1 per cent of world-wide GDP.

The economic situation was substantially influenced by political considerations. African countries could be divided into three categories:

countries still in conflict; countries emerging from conflict; and the others. Through its preventive diplomatic work, relief assistance and reconstruction and development activities the United Nations system could help countries in these different categories, taking into account the particular needs of each.

The reforms initiated by ECA during the last two years were intended precisely to enable it to contribute effectively to the process of reconstruction, recovery and development in Africa. In particular, ECA had drawn up a new programme containing five subprogrammes addressing priority fields. It had restructured its secretariat and outposted 25 per cent of its staff to the five subregional development centres. It had taken various steps to restrict the number of its publications and to enhance the effectiveness of its meetings. It had recruited new, competent and experienced managers, both men and women, to assist the Executive Secretary in his task. Finally, it had rationalized its intergovernmental machinery by abolishing a number of ministerial meetings and by setting up a number of expert committees to give advice to policy makers.

To ensure that those reforms would give concrete results for member States, the ECA would endeavour to develop cooperation with the other institutions in the system, and in particular the Bretton Woods institutions. It would henceforth put to good use the expertise of African experts - in particular the findings of the regional research centres - and play a leading role in the formulation of pertinent viewpoints on Africa's development, particularly in the presentation of new approaches. It was strengthening its resource capacity to disseminate research findings on best practices and to facilitate exchanges of information among policy makers, and was seeking to become a centre for exchanges of information on development in Africa. Finally, it was stepping up its activities directed at strengthening the capacities of member States by means of seminars and workshops.

The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa provided an important mechanism for cooperation and coordination in support of Africa's development; it would permit the development of concrete programmes in areas such as health, education, information technology, food security and governance and would promote synergy among the institutions and harmonization of activities. ECA, as a co-chair of the ACC Steering Committee, would continue to play a key role in the implementation of the Initiative.

Mr. MOOY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)) stated that, although the dynamism of the Asia and Pacific region, which was due to a considerable degree to a better integration in the world economy, could no longer be called into question, a large number of countries and territories were still marginalized. Some two thirds of the poorest members of humankind lived in the region. Even in the countries with the highest growth rates, a significant proportion of the population was living in poverty. The reduction in the numbers of poor people, and in the proportion of poor people in the total population, seemed to have slowed down, and disparities in income between rural and urban areas still existed. Clearly much greater efforts needed to be made to improve employment among the rural poor. In addition, inadequacies in infrastructure and transport and communication services were clearly factors hampering economic expansion. In view of the difficulties being experienced by the public sector, the huge investments required to remedy those shortcomings would have to come from the private sector.

The fiftieth anniversary of ESCAP had provided member States with an opportunity to reaffirm the essential role which the Commission, drawing strength from its neutrality and universality, could and must play in promoting subregional cooperation and strengthening the spirit of inter-country cooperation. Member States had insisted on the need to devise programmes responding more directly to the different needs of countries at the various stages in their development. The fact that the levels of development reached by the countries of the region differed widely offered them an opportunity of sharing their experiences in that field. The speaker mentioned in this connection the memorandum of understanding which ESCAP had recently concluded with the Government of Singapore under which the latter would open its training facilities to Pacific Island nationals and hoped that other similar agreements would be concluded.

The priority areas of work identified for ESCAP at its fiftieth session included the provision of policy guidance to member States in meeting the challenges of globalization, the eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment, human resources development and the promotion of regional cooperation in trade, investment, technology transfer and infrastructure development.

As part of its reform process, which it looked on as an ongoing process forming an element in the wider reform of the United Nations system requiring regular evaluation, ESCAP had decided to review its conference structure with a view to improving delivery of its work programme while securing greater participation by its members and associate members in its activities. It decided to retain its thematic programming approach, which all in all offered more advantages than disadvantages and which might even prove of increasing relevance in the light of the growing complexity of development problems. ESCAP considered that it was well equipped to assist its member States, not only through its activities of a normative and analytical nature but also through its operational role as a catalyst in promoting sharing of experience and in providing technical assistance in fields such as training and capacity-building.

ESCAP considered that every effort must be made to avoid duplication and would continue to look closely into fields which did not fall within the specific purview of any international organization, such as transport and energy. In other fields it could play a complementary role. One example was the field of trade, where it had taken the initiative of examining with Asian countries which were not members of WTO the benefits they might gain from membership.

ESCAP appreciated the role of the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific in regional coordination and was endeavouring to develop a spirit of partnership with the different representatives of civil society. In 50 years the world in general, and the Asia and Pacific region in particular, had greatly changed. At the outset ESCAP had had 10 members; it now had 60, including associate members. Fully aware of the need to adapt to changing circumstances, it would continue to endeavour to respond to the needs of its members and to work actively for the economic and social development of the region.

Mr. EL-BEBLAWI (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)) was pleased to be able to report that the Western Asian region as a whole had in 1996 achieved a significant improvement in terms of its macroeconomic indicators, primarily owing to the increase in oil prices and the success of the economic reforms. However, the continuation

of economic sanctions against Iraq and the uncertainties surrounding the peace process in the Middle East had contributed to the worsening of the problem of unemployment in the member States of ESCWA.

ESCWA had participated actively in the process of reform of the United Nations. The reform it had itself undertaken since 1993 in close consultation with its member States and all parties concerned had already yielded concrete results. The restructuring of the Commission had been completed, its medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 had been revised, and the work programmes for 1994-1995 and 1996-1997 had been reformulated. The Commission had also taken measures in the organizational and administrative fields and also to reinforce regional inter-agency coordination and establish new mechanisms for cooperation and consultation with member States and regional organizations.

The Meeting of Eminent Persons organized in December 1996 to discuss the role and future of ESCWA had evaluated the reforms effected and approved the new priorities as defined. At its nineteenth session, ESCWA had adopted a resolution confirming the appropriateness of those priorities. Member States had approved the reforms and called for a strengthening of the Commission's role in the coordination of their economic and social policies.

During 1996, ESCWA had focused on areas of priority for the region, and in particular the water issue, regional transport and communications networks, the integration of the region into the world trade system and the effects of the Middle East peace process on the economic and social situation in member States. It had also been actively involved in the promotion of sustainable development, the eradication of poverty, the harmonization of standards and legislative instruments and the development of a regional approach to follow up on international conferences. It had systematically adopted an intersectoral and multidisciplinary approach to the planning and implementation of its work programme.

The strengthening of regional cooperation had been given concrete form through the meetings of the Commission's intergovernmental bodies. ESCWA had continued to coordinate its activities with those of regional and international organizations and other United Nations bodies. Its new Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group had met several times, primarily to discuss the establishment of a programme of joint action to give effect to the recommendations of global conferences. As regards its role in the

Middle East, ESCWA had participated in the Middle East-North African Economic Conference, held in Cairo in November 1996, and in the First Mediterranean Development Forum, held in Marrakesh in May 1997.

In conclusion, Mr. El-Beblawi stated that, as the regional arm of the United Nations in Western Asia, ESCWA was determined to promote sustainable development which would be continually strengthened by enhanced cooperation with member States and with all the regional bodies concerned, both governmental and non-governmental. To achieve that goal in a rapidly changing world, a new vision for the region was required.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) said that the work programme of ECLAC sought to help Governments to respond to the three principal challenges of economic development in the region: to increase the growth rate and achieve greater equity; to raise levels of saving and investment; and, lastly, to promote the incorporation of member countries into the international economy by strengthening the economic integration of Latin America and the Caribbean. One of the principal activities carried out by ECLAC since July 1996 had been the organization in April 1997 in São Paulo (Brazil) of the first regional conference held in the developing world to follow up on the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, on the conclusion of which member States had adopted the "Consensus of São Paulo".

The question of the reform of the regional commissions, which had formed the subject of General Assembly resolution 50/227 and Council resolution 1996/41, had already been examined by ECLAC before the adoption of those two resolutions. The Commission had selected six objectives: to reaffirm the institutional identity of ECLAC as a centre of excellence charged with collaborating with member States; to define priorities in the work programme with greater rigor; to simplify its organizational structure; to achieve greater efficiency in management; to take measures for institutional development; and, finally, to strengthen its relationships with other regional and multilateral organizations. A special working group open to all member countries had been instructed to assist the Secretariat in defining priorities for its work programme and to recommend strategic orientations. The draft budget for the programmes of the 1998/1999 biennium, currently before the Fifth Committee, reflected all the reforms underway. In conclusion, he stated that the Secretary-General was expected to announce a pilot project covering

the whole of the United Nations system and providing for transition from ex ante verification of expenditure to ex post verification of results. ECLAC welcomed this technique, which was already in widespread application in both public administrations and the business world. Concluding his statement, Mr. Rosenthal said that ECLAC, which had already made great strides towards the overall aims of restructuring and revitalizing the United Nations system, would maintain its efforts during the coming months.

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to join in an informal discussion with the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions.

Mr. M.M. DLAMINI (Observer, Swaziland) welcomed the reforms undertaken to revitalize the ECA, to introduce networking into the system and to develop closer cooperation with African subregional and regional organizations. Those measures should make it possible to establish a common reference basis on economic development in Africa and promote pursuit of the objectives of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. He suggested that the training of government officials should be organized at the subregional level. He asked whether ECA was contemplating the organization of workshops to prepare member States for the trade negotiations within WTO and how long the developing countries would subsequently have to wait to receive a return on their efforts.

Ms. KIZILDELI (Turkey) welcomed the new management system which the reforms were introducing within the United Nations system. She asked how interaction between the funds, programmes and specialized agencies concerned with development, on the one hand, and the regional economic commissions on the other, could be improved; how overlapping in follow-up on major international conferences could be avoided; and how relations between the different commissions could be improved so that each would benefit from the experience and specialized knowledge of the others.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) asked how ESCAP could remedy the huge disparities between growth rates in the different countries of the region and help to eliminate overlapping between United Nations bodies, national or regional organizations and the regional commissions themselves. He asked how ESCAP would participate within the common framework of development aid which the Secretary-General had proposed to establish in each country.

Mr. MCHUMO (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania) speaking to the Executive Secretary of ECA, expressed surprise that the report of the

Secretary-General entitled "Regional Cooperation in the Economic, Social and Related Fields" (E/1997/40) contained no reference to the New United Nations Agenda for Development of Africa during the 1990s. At its previous substantive session the Council had emphasized that the ECA should help to render that programme operational. He asked why the Commission had decided not to give effect to the decisions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the subject. He also asked what amounts had already been mobilized out of the commitments of approximately US$ 25 billion made at the time of the launching of the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa.

On a more general plane, he asked whether the regional commissions had undertaken studies to facilitate the examination of their mandate by the Council.

Mr. BAHAMONDES (Canada) asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC how the strengthening of the links between regional bodies and regional commissions would be effected. In more general terms, were other regional commissions contemplating developments of the same type? The thematic approach was an important coordination tool which had been mentioned by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, and the Canadian delegation would like additional information on the subject. Finally, he asked the Executive Secretary of ECA to describe the current position regarding cooperation and coordination between institutions in the United Nations system regarding their concrete activities to assist Africa. A "grey area" existed between normative and operational activities. He asked whether a regional strategy note would constitute a useful mechanism in this regard.

Mr. ACEMAH (Uganda) asked the Executive Secretary of ECA a number of questions. Had the Commission drawn up strategies to face up to the gravity of the social situation in Africa? Should it not consider changing its name to become the Economic and Social Commission for Africa? Had it adopted strategies for the eradication of poverty? What role did it propose to play in support of the establishment of an African economic community, decided on by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at the Harare summit meeting?

Mr. SIMKHADA (Observer for Nepal) asked how the different regional commissions saw their role in the sphere of vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation. He went on to ask the Executive Secretary of ESCAP what role that body could play in the sharing of experience in the field

of development which he had mentioned, and what programmes the Commission was offering to the least developed and landlocked countries in the region, particularly in the area of capacity-building.

Mr. AMOAKO (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)) fully recognized the importance of capacity-building and training for government officials at the subregional level. The ECA had greatly expanded its activities in that field (organization of workshops and seminars) and would expand them further during the next biennium; it had decentralized 25 per cent of its staff to secure closer contact with Governments at the subregional level. It was fully aware of the importance of the trade negotiations organized within the framework of WTO and was endeavouring to strengthen the negotiating capacities of African Governments in that field. The objectives of the New United Nations Agenda for the Development of Africa differed little from those of ECA; this was particularly the case with regard to mobilization of resources, diversification and regional integration. It was therefore incorrect to say that ECA was playing no part in the implementation of that programme. Moreover, ECA was playing a major role with regard to the Special Initiative for Africa, an excellent field for cooperation between the Commission and other United Nations bodies, and which was primarily directed towards achieving improvements in the social sector.

The distinction between normative and operational activities was somewhat artificial. ECA had to have both operational activities - organization of workshops, seminars and training in conjunction with other United Nations bodies - and normative activities - dissemination of good practice, advocacy, networking, etc. In conclusion, he stated that the ECA was contributing to the establishment of an African economic community by giving support to institutions at the subregional level.

Mr. BERTHELOT (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)) replied to the questions on the relations between the regional commissions and other regional bodies. The latter, in his view, could be divided into two categories. Those in the first category had well-established secretariats, and in its relations with bodies in that category a regional commission should seek a satisfactory division of tasks and the harmonization of programming. The ECE enjoyed relations of that kind with OECD and the European Union in the statistical field; the programmes of the three bodies were different, but they were established jointly within the framework of the

Conference of European Statisticians. Similarly, cooperation had been developed with the Council of Europe in the environment sphere; the Council was concerned with the protection of wildlife and the ECE with natural disasters. Thus the problem was one of ensuring that the activities undertaken in sectors in which several regional bodies had responsibilities were mutually complementary.

Regional bodies without large secretariats or with primarily political aims should make use of the technical work done by the ECE. That was the principle underlying cooperation between ECE and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was also having to integrate the economic dimension within its activities. The ECE was helping in that field through joint seminars, workshops, etc. Cooperation of that type between the two bodies would be formalized by an exchange of letters in the near future.

The primary concern of ECE in its relations with subregional groups was one of passing on knowledge of what it was doing, thus giving an indirect impetus to implementation of instruments it had itself developed.

The same could be said of cooperation with bodies with global mandates. There was no difficulty in establishing relations with organizations possessing large secretariats on subjects such as the publication of major economic studies. The analyses concerning the eastern European countries contained in the World Economic and Social Survey, published in New York, were taken from the European Economic Survey prepared by the ECE in Geneva. A further example of cooperation, this time with UNCTAD and the International Trade Centre (ITC), was the precise definition by the ECE of the role of each of the three institutions with regard to trade facilitation.

The Turkish delegation had inquired whether the work of one regional commission was disseminated among the others. The question was of importance for the development of cooperation among commissions. As a matter of principle, there was no requirement of similarity between regional commissions, since the needs differed from region to region. ECE had established a number of standards and formulated a large number of conventions. Obviously, some of them were only of concern to Europe, but others might interest other regions. For instance, the first country to ratify the Container Pool Convention was Angola. Similarly, nearly all countries had acceded to the TIR Convention, even though that convention had

initially been designed to regulate road transport in Europe. Other conventions might serve as benchmarks: one current example was that of the Convention on Long-range Trans-boundary Air Pollution.

On the question of the presumed incompatibility between operational activities and analytical work, the speaker associated himself unreservedly with the remarks of the Executive Secretary of ECA.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) disagreed with the suggestion that the global vocation of the United Nations would prevent it from properly discharging its role at the regional or subregional level. ECLAC was cooperating actively with the Organization of American States (OAS) and with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in the promotion of economic integration in the region it covered and the establishment of a free trade Area in that region. For purposes of the division of labour between the three institutions, the particular strength of the Commission lay precisely in the fact that the United Nations system, to which it belonged, had a global mandate. In fact, the United Nations was particularly well placed to work with governments to advance the cause of regionalization. When governments were asked whether the work of the Commissions should continue to be orientated in that direction, the response was invariably affirmative.

Mr. MOOY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)) fully recognized the disparities in levels of development in the region covered by ESCAP. On that account the Commission classified its members in three groups: the least developed and the landlocked countries; the developing Pacific Island countries; and the countries in transition. Naturally, the Committee was devising different forms of action to assist each of those groups. In addition, the Commission was increasingly seeking to benefit from the experience acquired by those of its members which had emerged from a state of underdevelopment, asking them to serve as models for countries wishing to follow similar paths. For instance, a training course in tourism management would take place in September 1997 in Singapore. ESCAP also intended in the near future to take advantage of the level of development in Malaysia, and later those achieved in Thailand and Indonesia. In that sense repetition of certain activities could give fruitful results, and pejorative references to overlapping were undeserved.

On the question of overlapping, the speaker pointed out that certain United Nations institutions were of a sectoral character, whereas a regional commission was by definition multisectoral; consequently overlapping was in certain respect inevitable. In any case, to avoid unnecessary overlapping as far as possible, ESCAP had in 1994 established the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific, which had 13 subcommittees, each chaired by a different agency. ESCAP provided secretariat services for the Committee and its subcommittees, all of which met frequently to exchange information, to identify cases of overlapping to be discontinued and to select joint projects.

In order to implement the thematic approach it had adopted, ESCAP began ensuring the necessary coordination within the Commission itself as soon as programming had been formulated in intersectoral terms. Not until the programming had been finally adopted did it set about the task of ensuring inter-agency coordination at the regional level. It also endeavoured to ensure coordination at national level through contacts with the UNDP resident representatives.

Doubts had been expressed in certain circles concerning the possible incompatibility between analytical research and operational activities in the field. Like his colleagues, the speaker considered that the two types of activity must rather be considered as mutually complementary and parallel.

He failed to see what body might act as negotiating partner vis-à-vis the United Nations system in the course of the preparation of a national strategy note. In contrast, the preparation of a framework for regional cooperation by UNDP was in line with a concept which was well-known and had already been applied.

Mr. EL-BEBLAWY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)) observed that certain members of the Council feared that it was impossible to give effect to major world conferences without giving rise to overlapping. However, ESCWA, as a matter of principle, contacted all the other institutions active in the region and drew up a programme of follow-up activities which should in theory prevent all overlapping. Such efforts to promote cooperation stood to reason, as currently all development institutions, including the regional commissions, faced with continually shrinking resources, were endeavouring to pool what they had.

However, as the Executive Secretary of ESCAP had pointed out, there was sometimes justification for overlapping. That was the case, for instance, with the structural adjustment programmes, which the countries concerned initially tended to reject. When the regional commission was consulted a posteriori and made a favourable recommendation, those programmes were better accepted.

Like his colleagues, Mr. El-Beblawy considered that there was no conflict between analytical work and operational activities - rather the opposite. Speaking on the subject of the possibility of a regional strategy note, he warned that it would be difficult to secure a consensus among a large number of countries.

Mr. YOUSSEF (Observer for Egypt) inquired how systematic dialogue could be promoted between the regional commissions and the bodies with headquarters in Geneva (ILO, WHO, UNCTAD, etc.) whose work had a direct impact on the activities of the commissions. He asked how ECA envisaged the prospects of cooperation with OAU, the African Development Bank, the Arab League and various Arab financing agencies and what measures were contemplated to coordinate the work of the regional commissions in the field of information technologies.

Mr. KERBER (United States of America) considered that the discussion presently taking place should have taken place earlier in the session, because it had a direct relationship to the subject selected for the high-level debate. He asked how the regional commissions anticipated strengthening their relations with the United Nations bodies with responsibilities for operational activities. He noted that the budgets for 1998-1999 of all the regional commissions showed increases (45 per cent in the case of ESCWA) and hoped that those increases related to actual projects and not to administrative expenditure. He was in some doubt regarding the means of improving cooperation between the regional commissions and the Economic and Social Council in such a way that the latter should take greater account of the activities of the commissions. Referring to the innovative measures planned by ECLAC, particularly within the framework of the pilot management plan, he asked whether the other commissions were contemplating adoption of similar measures to improve the administration of their programmes and to

decentralize decision-making. Finally, he asked what the contribution of the regional commissions would be to the high-level meeting on the least-developed countries which was to be held in October under the auspices of WTO.

Mr. AARDAL (Observer for Norway) expressed satisfaction at the efforts made by ECA to integrate the complex of gender-specific problems into its activities and to increase the number of women in its executive bodies. He asked for figures showing the results of those efforts within ECA and the other commissions. He asked what had become of the Leadership Fund for African Women referred to in paragraph 182 of document E/1997/40. ECA had just organized an important forum on the management of public affairs in Addis Ababa. It was to be hoped that the report on the proceedings of that meeting would be rapidly made available and distributed to all the partners of the Commission. Norway reaffirmed its intention to strengthen its cooperation with the Commission for purposes of implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa.

Mr. KONDO (Japan) stated that an Asia-Africa Forum had recently been held in Thailand as part of the programme of South-South cooperation. During that forum the countries and the international organizations represented decided to focus their cooperation on the following priority sectors: capacity building, the sustainable improvement of agricultural productivity and the development of the private sector. He asked how those priorities would be reflected in the activities of ESCAP.

Mr. JORGENSEN (WHO) referred to the proposal that the Council should take responsibility for coordination between the regional commissions and all other intergovernmental bodies, whether or not they formed part of the United Nations system. He asked what inter-agency mechanisms were anticipated at Council level to ensure coordination with bodies outside the United Nations system. He also asked whether the bodies in question had communicated their reactions to that proposal, and whether the existing coordination structures would not suffice without the involvement of the cumbersome machinery of the Council.

Mr. MAQUIEIRA (Chile) considered that, within the framework of the reform of the regional commissions, the pilot plan mentioned by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC could be a very useful instrument for improving the functioning of the commissions. In his view ECLAC should be given broad autonomy in the implementation of the reforms and strengthen its consultations

with States Members as that implementation proceeded. He asked whether it would not be desirable, to facilitate coordinated and integrated follow-up on major United Nations conferences, to establish at regional level special teams modelled on those created at the system-wide level.

Mr. CLARISME (Observer for Haiti) observed that cooperation had developed between ECLAC and certain multilateral and regional organizations, such as the IMF and, above all, the IDB, to create a free trade area in the region. He asked for information on the extent of cooperation between ECLAC and the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM) and the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR).

Mrs. ASHIPALA-MUSAVYI (Observer for Namibia) asked what measures had been taken, within the framework of the follow-up on the major United Nations conferences, to strengthen the African Centre for Women. She asked for information on the relations between the headquarters of ECA and the subregional centres. During the high-level debate a number of speakers had emphasized the role of the private sector as the locomotive of growth. That sector was still at an embryonic stage in Africa. She asked whether cooperation for the development of the private sector existed between ECA and the other regional commissions.

Mr. CABACTULAN (Philippines) considered that the principle of a regional strategy note should be envisaged with caution. He asked how the regional commissions could use the thematic groups in such a way as to make them an effective instrument for the coordinated and integrated follow-up of major United Nations conferences, particularly those on intersectoral problems. He also asked what functions should be specifically delegated to them, within the framework of the overall reform of the regional commissions, to enable them better to respond to the needs of member States. Finally, he asked whether the regional commissions should not be associated with the work of the subcommittees of the ACC, such as the Subcommittee on Water Resources Development.

Mr. SABOIA (Brazil) considered that, in view of the highly diverse nature of the regional commissions, the reforms should be implemented in a decentralized fashion. In the circumstances he wondered if one could reasonably contemplate assigning to the Council the task of supervising the regional commissions.

Mr. HIDAYAT (Observer for Indonesia) asked how ESCAP could strengthen its cooperation with the regional groups and how population questions could be integrated within the complex of activities being conducted by the Commission.

Mr. AMOAKO (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa), in reply to the questions relating to the Special Initiative for Africa, stated that he was unable for the time being to indicate how much of the expected US$ 25 billion had actually been mobilized. It had to be remembered that the Initiative had been launched only a year earlier and that it was designed to cover a 15-year period. Implementation would take place at the national level on the basis of specific plans of action matching national priorities, on the basis of which the volume of resources necessary could be determined. The Initiative would be the operational instrument of the United Nations New Agenda for Africa's Development during the 1990s. It could play an important role as a catalyst for the mobilization of additional resources; one example of that effect could be seen in the recent forum on the management of public affairs, at the end of which a meeting of donors took place.

Mechanisms were already in place for systematic dialogue with the Geneva-based organizations. Under the Special Initiative those bodies participated in all the technical meetings of the Steering Committee of ACC in Addis Ababa. A memorandum of agreement on cooperation on trade-related questions and negotiations with WTO had been signed with UNCTAD.

ECA had established a joint secretariat with the African Development Bank (which was also undergoing reform) for the conduct of joint studies. With OAU the objective was to promote complementarity of activities to the greatest possible extent; one of the principal areas of cooperation would be the prevention of conflicts and the transition from a war context to an optic of development.

In its budget for 1998/1999 ECA planned to devote more resources to the more systematic use of information technologies, training in that field, intranet installation, etc. At the same time, the Commission was endeavouring to promote those techniques at national level.

ECA had every intention of drawing on the ECLAC pilot plan to improve its budgetary and administrative management methods and to that end had sent a mission to ECLAC.

ECA was associated with the preparation of the high-level meeting on the least-developed countries and in that context was participating in joint studies (in particular with UNCTAD) on questions of vital importance to it.

The primary function of the Leadership Fund for African Women was to back up the activities of ECA in the field of promotion of women through projects in a number of priority sectors (legal aspects, access to credit, etc.). The African Centre for Women was coordinating all the activities of the Commission relating to women. New managers had been appointed in the Centre, and its staff had been doubled. As part of the follow-up on the Beijing conference a meeting on the integration of gender-specific problems in the activities of ECA was planned for April 1998. By then the Commission hoped to have reports describing the current condition of women in all African countries. In the context of follow-up on the Cairo conference it had been agreed with UNFPA that the next ECA conference of ministers would be primarily devoted to population questions.

The subject of development of the private sector had been raised during the most recent conference of finance ministers. The Commission itself had given attention to questions of trade and investment promotion and had organized a number of meetings and events designed in particular to promote the creation in Africa of capital markets, stock exchanges, etc. Cooperation with the Asian region had begun within the framework of a programme sponsored by the Government of Japan. In particular, the establishment of an Africa-Asia foundation to promote exchanges of information and partnerships for the development of the private sector was contemplated.

Mr. BERTHELOT (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)) regretted that the United Nations funds and programmes responsible for development-oriented operational activities did not make sufficient use of the capacities and expertise of the regional commissions and the organizations with a global mandate. The commissions had not been invited to take part in the establishment of the regional programming outlines, and the teams of regional advisers should be strengthened further.

The budget of ECE was shrinking. During the financial year 1996-1997 the Commission had reduced its staff by 8 per cent. He hoped that decentralization should be taken much further than had hitherto been the case. The representative of Brazil had asked a question concerning the relations between the Council and the commissions to which there was no simple answer.

To be able to follow up the Council had to be informed so as to be in a position to give guidelines; but it was not its responsibility to establish programmes of work. Those programmes were established by governments in the light of the principles or guidelines which it was the task of the Council to frame.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)), replying to the Observer for Haiti, stated that ECLAC was cooperating actively with CARICOM and MERCOSUR through its offices in Brazil, Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

The representatives of Brazil, the United States and Chile had raised important questions, in particular on the relations between the commissions and the Council. Rather than give excessively brief replies he preferred to make a statement on the subject at the next sitting.

Mr. MOOY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)), replying to the representative of Japan, stated that ESCAP had many opportunities to cooperate with the other regional commissions and with other institutions active in the region and was making good use of them. For instance, the World Bank and IMF were members of the regional inter-agency committee for Asia and the Pacific. There was also active cooperation with subregional groups such as ASEAN.

ESCAP proposed to seek the advice of certain other commissions, such as ECLAC, on means of reducing expenditure. ECLAC seemed to be able to work just as effectively even though it had reduced the number of its meetings and publications. However, notwithstanding the savings to be made, ESCAP would continue to seek means of developing closer cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

Mr. EL-BEBLAWY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)) stated that the budget of ESCWA had been reduced by 6.4 per cent following staff reductions. The apparent increase was due to the fact that the Commission was leaving Amman to return to Beirut, where the cost of living, and consequently the post adjustment, were higher.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.25 p.m.